UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/50/347
21 August 1995

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Fiftieth session
Item 98 (b) of the provisional agenda*

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: DESERTIFICATION AND DROUGHT

Report of the Secretary-General

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In its resolution 48/175 of 21 December 1993 the General Assembly, while recalling its resolution 32/172 of 19 December 1977 and taking note of the recommendation contained in paragraph 38.27 of Agenda 21 1/ and of decision 93/33 of 18 June 1993 of the Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report for submission to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session on the implementation of the present resolution.

2. In its resolution, the General Assembly welcomed the support of the international community to countries affected by drought and desertification in light of Agenda 21, chapter 12, entitled "Managing fragile ecosystems: combating desertification and drought", and of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa and urged it to continue its support. It also took note of decision 93/33 of the Governing Council of UNDP to make the experience and expertise of the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO) available to all affected countries. It was also recommended that the cooperation between UNDP and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) be strengthened and enlarged. The resolution appealed to all members of the international community to support efforts undertaken at subregional levels within subregional organizations and within the United Nations system.

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II. SUPPORT BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO IMPLEMENT THE PROGRAMMES OUTLINED IN CHAPTER 12 OF AGENDA 21

3. The lessons learned and knowledge gained over the past two decades in desertification control and drought mitigation culminated in 1994 in the adoption of the Convention to Combat Desertification. Growing from the awareness of the nexus between environment and development generated by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, this important international treaty represents a fundamental shift in the world community's response to desertification in both conceptual and operational terms.

4. In a comprehensive way, the Convention to Combat Desertification combines many of the key elements of what can be a successful international programme of desertification control. These include partnerships between contributor countries, government entities in affected countries, and civil society organizations. These also include the development of action programmes at national, subregional and regional levels, to be implemented, in the case of the national action programmes, through a participatory process involving affected communities, community-based organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In addition, the Convention to Combat Desertification calls for flexible funding mechanisms to channel resources to the local level.

5. Of particular importance, the Convention to Combat Desertification calls for using innovative approaches in the preparation of national action programmes in affected countries. In creating these programmes, Governments have agreed to involve stakeholders and communities in defining problems and solutions and in the implementation. The national action programme process thus provides a prime opportunity for broad-based national participation in identifying the root causes of degeneration of the drylands, and in designing of planning and implementation processes to address them as well as other related sustainable development problems.

6. In order to cater for differences in the various affected regions of the world, the Convention to Combat Desertification incorporates four regional implementation annexes: for Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Northern Mediterranean countries. These will provide a framework within which the regional or subregional organizations can play a key role through the development of subregional action programmes and regional action programmes. For example in Africa, the regional and subregional organizations such as the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Permanent Interstate Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the Arab Maghreb Union, will play a key role in areas that lend themselves to subregional cooperation such as the management of shared resources, exchanging knowledge and experiences, scientific and technical cooperation, drought monitoring and early warning, and the development of common policies in various areas such as trade.

III. IMPLEMENTATION OF UNDP GOVERNING COUNCIL DECISION 93/33 THAT CALLS FOR THE EXPERIENCE AND TECHNICAL EXPERTISE OF UNSO IN DROUGHT AND DESERTIFICATION CONTROL TO BE MADE AVAILABLE TO ALL AFFECTED COUNTRIES, IN PARTICULAR THOSE IN AFRICA

7. In conformity with Agenda 21, paragraph 38.27, 2/ and as stated in UNDP Executive Board report DP/1994/58, UNDP has taken steps to strengthen its capacity to support desertification control activities world wide, particularly within the framework of the Convention to Combat Desertification. In this context, UNSO has been designated as the central entity within UNDP responsible for spearheading and supporting the agency's work in desertification control and drought mitigation in all affected regions. As such, UNSO provides substantive advice, technical support, and assistance in developing programmes at the national, subregional and regional, and international levels. In carrying out its functions, UNSO works in all developing countries affected by desertification and drought, and functions as an integral part of UNDP, bringing the resources of the organization to better support desertification control efforts. UNSO now places a major emphasis on "upstream" support for action programmes and capacity building to complement specific "downstream" projects, while undertaking vigorous resource mobilization to increase domestic and international funding to combat desertification.

8. Central to its new role, UNSO is undertaking efforts to support affected countries in developing their own national action programmes on desertification. In partnership with affected countries, UNSO helps to identify the root causes of desertification and to address the constraints and bottlenecks contributing to the problem. UNSO seeks to support the development of strategies for desertification control that fit the particular needs of the affected country or region, while simultaneously promoting the involvement of affected communities and building new global partnerships.

9. In UNDP Executive Board decision 95/6, the Board noted its support for the initiatives that the UNDP Administrator had taken in support of the implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification, including the reorganization of UNSO and its activities in light of the Convention to Combat Desertification. The Executive Board further encouraged the Administrator to take the necessary steps to change the name of the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office in order to better reflect its new role. Since April 1995, the Office, while retaining its acronym UNSO, is now called the Office to Combat Desertification and Drought.

IV. STRENGTHENING OF COOPERATION BETWEEN UNEP AND UNDP IN COMBATING DESERTIFICATION AND DROUGHT

10. In response to Agenda 21, paragraph 38.27 on desertification, and as noted in the UNEP report to its Governing Council (UNEP/GC.18/3), the two programmes have continued to support their joint activities during this period.

11. The UNDP/UNEP joint venture has been an important operational arrangement in combating desertification in the Sudano-Sahelian region. During 1979-1994,

UNDP and UNEP together contributed $26.7 million in seed resources to this joint venture through UNSO for the implementation of the Programme of Action to Combat Desertification.

12. These seed resources have allowed UNSO to develop pilot projects, catalyse regional activities and carry out public information, sensitization and training programmes for assisting the 23 countries in the Sudano-Sahelian region. Through the joint venture and the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Trust Fund, UNSO has mobilized over $330 million for projects directly related to national and regional drought and desertification control activities.

13. The Administrator of UNDP and the Executive Director of UNEP issued a joint declaration in March 1994 to harness the comparative advantages of each organization: UNDP experience in development, its global network of country offices, its capacity to be operational at the country level and its coordination role for the United Nations system at the country level; UNEP experience in catalysing action on the environment, in promoting environmental management, its role in the coordination, sensing and assessment of global environment and desertification activities, and in the provision of technical, scientific and general information. This collaboration will actively support the implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification.

14. To build upon their long and successful joint venture experience, UNEP and UNDP signed in 1995 a new partnership agreement to refocus the joint venture into the Partnership to Combat Desertification and Drought. Under the new UNEP and UNDP partnership agreement, the two organizations will develop programme packages and jointly mobilize resources in areas where the two organizations have complementary expertise. These programme packages will support the implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification in all affected countries, particularly in Africa, and will be extended to other concerned organizations. Initially, these joint programmes will focus on: (a) awareness raising and sensitization on desertification; (b) monitoring and assessment of desertification; (c) supporting advisory services to Governments on policy issues related to desertification control; (d) providing support to NGOs for implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification; (e) providing support to subregional and regional organizations for implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification; (f) promoting work on scientific and technological issues relevant to desertification; (g) providing a means for cooperation at international level with other partners.

V. SUPPORT BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION AND DROUGHT

National initiatives

15. It is noted that the major responsibility for implementing measures to combat desertification and drought and more specifically the national action programme process outlined in the Convention rests with the affected countries. For the Convention to be successfully implemented, affected countries have to play the lead role. The initiative which has been demonstrated by affected countries in taking this responsibility is duly noted, with the hope that the

efforts that they have initiated will result in effective, participatory programmes.

Within subregional and regional organizations

16. Regional and subregional organizations continue to play an important role in the implementation of the provisions of Agenda 21, chapter 12, and support to the Convention to Combat Desertification process.

17. CILSS, IGADD and SADC, with support from UNSO/UNDP, UNEP, United Nations multilateral organizations and bilateral organizations, have launched initial activities including consultation meetings among their respective member States for the elaboration of the subregional processes on issues in the context of Agenda 21, chapter 12, and the negotiation of the Convention to Combat Desertification to support national action programmes and launch subregional action programmes.

International community

18. The support in facilitating these national, subregional and regional initiatives is noted, with the hope that these new partnerships envisioned under the Convention can be developed and sustained.

Bilateral donors

19. Bilateral donors have played an important role both substantially and financially in contributing to the negotiation process leading to the adoption of the Convention to Combat Desertification.

20. While recognizing the primary responsibility which rests with affected countries to initiate the national action programme process, bilateral donors have supported nationally driven efforts to implement the draft resolution on urgent action for Africa and the Convention to Combat Desertification.

United Nations system

21. The United Nations and UNDP/UNSO, UNEP, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Bank and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, have given support for activities focused on the negotiation process of the Convention to Combat Desertification and on preparations for its implementation. The effective work of the interim secretariat of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Convention to Combat Desertification has contributed significantly to the substantive results of the Convention to Combat Desertification process. UNSO and UNEP played a significant role in the negotiation process for the Convention to Combat Desertification, including financial and technical support to the interim secretariat, to regional and

subregional organizations, to affected countries, and for the participation of NGOs in the negotiation process.

22. Since the adoption of the Convention to Combat Desertification, numerous activities have taken place in support to the resolution on urgent action for Africa. With regard to support for national level activities, in response to country interest, the United Nations system is supporting (with other interested partners) preparatory activities and arrangements for the organization of national forums which are meant to bring together the stakeholders and partners to launch the national action programme process and to agree on means of supporting its implementation. Following the holding of national forums, technical support by the United Nations system will be provided for programme development as requested and required. In preparation for these national forums, a number of awareness raising materials have been published and activities have been organized at the national level to draw attention to the global problem, the Convention, and national efforts to address desertification and drought. These included celebration of the first annual National Desertification Day, on 17 June 1995. In support for subregional/regional level activities, the United Nations system has also extended institutional support to the appropriate subregional organizations to contribute to building the capacity to play a major role in the Convention to Combat Desertification process and in particular in the subregional action programme process.

23. In addition, collaboration with the Inter-agency Planning Group for Environmental Funds is taking place with a view to developing innovative approaches and contributing to the development of national desertification funds. Support is also being provided to OAU/concerned organizations and countries in Africa to initiate a reflection on the objectives/scope, governance for national desertification funds and innovative methods for domestic resource mobilization. The United Nations system has also supported the work of NGOs, including the establishment of the International NGO Network on Desertification. To harmonize approaches for supporting the draft resolution entitled "Urgent action for Africa", 3/ as well as to facilitate the exchange of information and coordination of activities, UNSO/UNDP and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)/Club du Sahel jointly organized an informal meeting with bilateral and multilateral organizations.

VI. CONCLUSION

24. Support for the implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification is urgently called for in light of the fact that globally, more than 900 million people live under the shadow of desertification and drought. Especially important is the need to support immediate actions in Africa, in line with the draft resolution concerning urgent action for Africa, which was adopted by the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification to facilitate early and concerted action for the region, prior to the entry into force of the Convention to Combat Desertification. Affected countries, especially those in Africa, will need to launch a range of activities, the most significant of which will be the preparation of a new generation of national action programmes. In support of

these national initiatives, the support of the international community, including the United Nations and its agencies, including UNDP and UNSO, UNEP, IFAD, FAO, WMO, and the World Bank, is noted and further encouraged.

25. Although General Assembly resolution 48/175 appealed to donor countries to contribute to UNSO, contributions have decreased since the adoption of the resolution. It is noted that even though the Convention to Combat Desertification adoption has caused an increase in interest, this has not been reflected in the level of multilateral funding for the Convention to Combat Desertification. In fact, since the adoption of Agenda 21, resources have not increased. While noting that further support is needed, it is hoped that greater efforts can be made to increase contributions for multilateral funding for the Convention to Combat Desertification. It is also noted that in view of the expanded geographical responsibility and in order to support the implementation process of the Convention to Combat Desertification, UNDP established the UNDP Fund to Combat Desertification and Drought. Donor countries and other interested parties are invited to support the Fund with contributions.

26. In addition, an appeal is made for donors to support subregional programmes, and active subregional organizations, including CILSS, IGADD, SADC, and the Arab Maghreb Union. Finally, and perhaps of most importance, an appeal is made to all parties to actively involve NGOs and community-based organizations in the implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification in view of its participatory approach.

Notes

1/ Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-24 June 1992.

2/ Agenda 21, paragraph 38.27: "The role of the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO), with added resources that may become available, operating under the umbrella of UNDP and with the support of UNEP, should be strengthened so that it can assume an appropriate major advisory role and participate effectively in the implementation of Agenda 21 provisions related to combating drought and desertification and to land resource management. In this context, the experience gained could be used by all other countries affected by drought and desertification, in particular those in Africa, with special attention to countries most affected or classified as least developed countries."

3/ A/AC.241/L.22/Rev.1.